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NOTES ON THE NATIVES OF BATHURST ISLAND, NORTH AUSTRALIA.

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With Plates VII-XX.

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Introduction.

In August of last year (1911), I visited Bathurst Island to inspect the natives on behalf of the Commonwealth Government. Accompanied by one of my inspectors (Mr. J. H. Kelly) and a crew consisting of a Chinaman, a Manilaman, and three natives of the Larrekiya Tribe,[1] I left Port Darwin at eleven o'clock in the evening and entered Apsley Strait early the next morning. We spent nine days in the examination of the island, entering the numerous salt-water arms and rivers, effecting a landing wherever possible and traversing the island on foot. Landing was, in most places, difficult on account of the thick growth of mangroves that fringes the island on the east. It had been my intention to circumnavigate the island, but a heavy monsoonal gale prevented us from even making the attempt in the small motor-craft at our disposal. I therefore decided to return *vid* Apsley Strait and inspect part of Melville Island.

The plates included in this paper are all reproductions of my original photographs and coloured drawings.

Condition of Natives.

I estimate the population of the island to be about 500. Their isolation and, no doubt in a measure also, their reputation as being cannibalistic and treacherous in their habits, have guarded their primitive condition to the present day.[2] Before

[1] *Vide Trans. Roy. Soc. of S. Australia*, vol. xxxi, 1907, p. 1.

[2] Compare the statement:—

"Melville Island, about 30 miles north of Port Darwin, is inhabited by a tribe of which very little is known. They do not circumcize, and speak a different language from those on the mainland. They are represented as a very strong and powerful race.

"Before the arrival of the Hon. B. T. Finniss at Escape Cliffs in 1864, the Melville Island natives occasionally visited the mainland for the purpose of stealing lubras, in which they invariably succeeded; but they have not done so since. This tribe is of a very hostile nature, and on several occasions have attacked Europeans visiting the island. Their canoes and weapons are similar to those on the mainland." P. Foelsche: "Notes on the Aborigines of North Australia," *Trans. Roy. Soc. S. Australia*, vol. v, 1882, p. 17.